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Recent observations of Dull-coloured Grassquit *Tiaris obscura* in Mato Grosso reinforce its status as an austral migrant to south-west Brazil

by Andrew Whittaker & Braulio Carlos

Received 25 September 2003

On 16 September 2000, at Coxipó de Ouro, Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, whilst leading a bird tour, AW heard an unknown call in response to his imitation of Ferruginous Pygmy-owl *Glaucidium brasilianum*. Tracking this call to some low, dry thorny scrub bordering taller gallery forest, he located two unfamiliar dull-coloured Fringillidae. AW recommenced the owl imitations and the birds approached even closer, permitting excellent views at 5–6 m through 10 x 42 binoculars in perfect light. The following field marks were noted: two small c.10.5–11.0 cm nondescript

dull seedeaters, olive-brown above with a slightly paler buffy eye-ring and one had slightly richer brownish fringes to the greater wing-coverts. The only distinctive feature shown by both birds was the short, stubby bicoloured bill, with pale yellowish lower mandible contrasting with a darker dusky upper mandible. Underparts were a dirty off-white sandy coloration, paler than the browner upperparts. The general nondescript plumage combined with the distinctive bicoloured bill confirmed that they were *Tiaris obscura*. AW recognised the significance of this record, but as the birds were silent and he lacked photographic equipment, documentation was impossible. The two *Tiaris obscura* loosely associated with two Red Pileated-finches *Coryphospingus cucullatus*, which had also approached closely in response to the owl imitation.

AW shared this exciting record with BC, alerting him to the possible presence of the species in the northern Pantanal during the austral winter. On 8 March 2002, near Poconé, Mato Grosso, in open grassland along the Transpantaneira highway leading into the northern Pantanal (16°19'S, 56°38'W), BC heard an unknown vocalisation that reminded him of the cut of *T. obscura* on Mayer (2000). In response to playback of this recording, a single *T. obscura* immediately approached to within 2 m, remaining very agitated, but silent. Thus, again, audio recordings could not be obtained to authenticate the record. BC noted the bicoloured bill as extremely evident, yellowish below with a dark dusky maxilla, and that the bird had an indistinct buff eye-ring. Following playback of *G. brasilianum* the only other seedeater to approach was an immature male Dark-throated Seedeater *Sporophila ruficollis*. Again, on 16 October 2002, at Chapada dos Guimarães, Mato Grosso, BC observed 2–3 *T. obscura* at the transition between gallery forest and shorter dry scrub. All were easily distinguished by their distinct bicoloured bills. They remained silent and were in a monotypic flock, without any other seedeaters.

Bates (1997) drew attention to two overlooked historic *T. obscura* specimens housed in the American Natural History Museum (AMNH), collected by H. H. Smith at Chapada, Mato Grosso, Brazil, on 29 July and 30 August 1885. These two (AMNH 32582 and 32588) had been overlooked for over a century, having been misidentified as female Sooty Grassquits *Tiaris fuliginosa* (e.g. Allen 1891, Naumburg 1930, Hellmayr 1938). They are the first Brazilian specimens of *T. obscura*. Bates (1997) suggested they are *T. o. obscura*, which breeds in Paraguay and Argentina, and is a regular visitor during the austral winter to the eastern lowlands of Bolivia, Paraguay and northern Argentina. Bates (1997) went on to state that these records represent non-breeding extralimitals and that additional information is required to determine the status of the species in the region.

Our recent field observations reinforce the impression that *T. o. obscura* is an austral migrant to south-west Brazil, which due to its cryptic similarity in the field to several species of female seedeaters *Sporophila* sp. and female grassquits *Tiaris* sp. has most probably been long overlooked. We hope our report will alert observers to pay critical attention to female-type *Sporophila* and *Tiaris*, particularly during the austral winter, and permit them to key into *T. obscura*. We recommend

detailed field searches for *T. obscura* in south-west Brazil during the austral winter to clarify its range and status in Brazil.

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A specimen of Cape Petrel *Daption capense* from north-east Brazil

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Received 8 October 2003

Cape Petrel *Daption capense* is a mid-sized procellariiform which breeds on subantarctic islands throughout the Southern Ocean, and the Antarctic Peninsula and continent (Harrison 1983, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). On dispersal, which commences February–March, it regularly occurs north to *c.*25°S, and has reached Ecuador and Colombia, and even Mexico and northern California; in the Atlantic, it reaches Uruguay and Brazil, north to Rio de Janeiro (Harrison 1983, Sick 1997).

As part of ongoing research on seabirds off north-east Brazil, we located an old, and apparently overlooked, specimen of the species at the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ), Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The bird (MCZ 226730, adult, sex unknown) was collected by George H. Mackay at Cabo de São Roque (05°29'S, 35°16'W), on the coast of Rio Grande do Norte, near the mouth of the Maxaranguape River (Paynter & Traylor 1991), on 9 June 1863. This record extends the species' range north more than 2,000 km in the western Atlantic (Blake 1977, Pinto 1978, Harrison 1983, Sick 1997, Vooren & Brusque 1999).

Measurements (mm) of the skin are: culmen 33; wing 262; tail 99 and tarsus 44. Plumage: upperparts with black mantle merging into white back and rump, both